



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

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R.I. Division of Planning Releases Population Projections through 2040

General Population Not Projected to Grow until 2020; Seventy-Five Percent Increase in R.I. Seniors Expected over Thirty Years

Providence, R.I. – The Rhode Island Department of Administration’s Division of Planning has released *Rhode Island Population Projections 2010-2040*. The projections and their accompanying report provide insight on the state’s future for state and local government, businesses, and service providers.

The state is expected to experience little population change through this decade until growth picks up during the 2020s. By the 2030s, that growth will be curbed by the aging of the state’s population. The projections also show that Rhode Island’s population is aging; over the next 30 years, the share of residents ages 65 and over will rise from 14% to 25%. The projections are available on the Division of Planning website at <http://www.planning.ri.gov/geodeminfo/data/popprojections.php>.

“Demographic projections offer important data to public and private sectors. This information will be critical as we work to strengthen Rhode Island's communities and build our economy,” said Kevin Flynn, Associate Director of Planning. Projections assist state and local governments with assessing future built environment and natural resource needs, including transportation options, appropriate housing, and sufficient water supply. Projections are also useful to entrepreneurs, developers, libraries, and school districts who want to know whom they will serve in the future.

“We are pleased to offer the projections as a resource for a variety of users,” said Jared Rhodes, Chief of the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, the group within the Division of Planning that developed the projections. “By publishing population projections for external use, we equip Rhode Island municipalities, business leaders, and service providers to meet tomorrow’s needs.”

The projections are separated by age group and sex in five-year intervals through the year 2040. Municipal population projections are also available in five-year intervals. The Division of Planning, which generates new population projections every ten years to coincide with decennial Census counts, developed the projections with input and review from numerous state and local officials.

The findings of the projections are based on the two demographic trends that drive all population change – the balance between births and deaths, known as “natural increase,” and the number of people who move in or out of an area, known as “in-migrants” or “out-migrants.” Currently, Rhode Island births outnumber deaths by about 2,500 each year, but that number is falling. As the state’s population ages, the ranks of older generations are growing at the same time as the number of women of childbearing age falls. Natural increase in the state will approach zero in the year 2030 and reach into negative territory after that.

Net migration, or the movement of people to and from Rhode Island from other states and countries, is a more fickle trend to follow. The state is currently experiencing net out-migration (more people are moving out of Rhode Island than moving in) but this trend is not expected to last past 2020, at which point employment in the state will have surpassed pre-recession numbers.

Waning natural increase means Rhode Island’s future population growth will depend on residents who move to the state, and Rhode Island is not alone in this respect. The U.S. Census reports that by 2038, immigration will become the primary driver of national population growth for the first time in nearly two centuries.

“Our nation has had higher immigration rates in the past [than it does now], particularly during the great waves of the late 19th and early 20th centuries,” said Thomas Mesenbourg, who recently retired as the Census Bureau’s Acting Director. “This projected milestone reflects the mix of our nation’s declining fertility rates, the aging of the baby boomer population and continued immigration.”

Slow population growth and an aging population will have significant impacts on jobs and economic development, the housing market, the state’s healthcare system, and the finance of retirement benefits. Changes in the age distribution will reduce the share of the population typically considered to be of working age (20-64) from 60.7% in 2010 to 54.2% in 2040. The very young and the elderly population tend to be the most dependent on the support of others, and a shrinking share of working age population may signal increased strain on those who support younger and older generations.

Businesses, organizations, and agencies who serve seniors in Rhode Island should expect increasing demand over the next thirty years. In 2010, there were 151,881 residents over the age of 65. By 2025 that figure is expected to rise to 219,917, and by 2040, there will be a projected 264,238 residents of Rhode Island who are 65 and older, an increase of nearly 75% over 30 years.

The projections are based on a series of stated assumptions. All population projections are based on an understanding of the past, although economic, policy, or public health developments could significantly change population dynamics. Two alternative net migration scenarios, high and low, are reviewed in Appendix A of the projections report. Users are encouraged to consider how new economic, political, or social trends may affect the stated assumptions and Rhode Island's future demographic change.

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